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DR. EMERSON AND THE "GUIDE
TO PRONUNCIATION."

THE remarks here offered have reference to the criticism, by Dr. O. F. Emerson, of the "Guide to Pronunciation" prefixed to the 'Webster's International Dictionary,' with my review of the same and his rejoinder, in MOD. LANG. NOTES for Jan., Apr., and Nov., 1892.

In treating of the vowels of a language in a thorough manner, the first thing to be done is to describe them as what they are in themselves, each in its own kind, independently of the graphic symbols used to represent them, and apart from their situation in particular words or syllabic combinations, and apart from variations they may undergo in quantity. As thus viewed, they are distinguished one from another by characteristic qualities perceived by the ear, and also by differences in the mode of formation by the organs.

Now we have, in Modern English, certain sounds which are customarily called "long vowels"; and certain others which are called "short vowels." And yet the so-called long, occurring as they sometimes do in unaccented syllables, become then actually short; as, the *e* in *legality* and the *o* in *oration*. The sound of the *e* is still specifically the same as in *legal*; and of the *o*, as in *oral*; though the shortening may cause a slight change of quality. The one is still called the long *e*; the other, the long *o*. It is also the case that the so-called "short vowels" are sometimes actually prolonged. The reason for the established use of the terms is that the so-called long are conceived as having a special congruity with long quantity; and the so-called short, with short quantity. In fact, the so-called long are capable of indefinite prolongation with ease and without change, while shortening beyond a certain degree brings with it a change of quality. On the other hand, any great prolongation of the so-called short tends strongly to what Dr. Rush calls a deformed pronunciation. The tendency of the one kind to actual length and of the other to actual shortness will, of course, take effect in the absence of contrary influences. It was perfectly proper to describe the one class of vowel sounds as "naturally long," and the other as "naturally short;" and it was quite in order to prepare

the way, by such careful definition, for a clear understanding of the sense of the terms as employed in the sequel. If Dr. Emerson would have authority for this use of terms, he may find "naturally long" employed, if I mistake not, in the sense as above explained on page 73 of the first edition of Sweet's 'History of English Sounds;' also on page 78 of 'Französische Phonetik,' by Franz Beyer, an able and scholarly work, highly commended by Paul Passy and others. The same phrase is used by Smart, and probably by other orthoëpical authorities, and, indeed, may be found in Latin and Greek Grammars.*

The naturally "long" comprehend all the "narrow" (or "primary") vowels together with the diphthongs; the "naturally short" are identical with the "wide." The wide form which Mr. Sweet finds as the initial element in what he calls the English long *i* is not, either naturally or actually, a long sound. Franz Beyer, on page 12 of the work above-cited, says it is the case in many languages, and specially in the English and the North and the Middle German, but not in the French, that length and shortness run parallel with narrowness and width, so that long vowels are narrow and short are wide; giving, as examples from the German, *Biene, bin; Schule, Schuld; über, üppig*; and of the English, *feel, fill; pool, pull*. And Mr. Sweet says, on page 9 of the work cited above, and on page 30 of the larger work by the same title, that long vowels tend to narrowness and short vowels to wideness. The physiological ground of this correspondence is not far to seek. In producing the narrow, there is a firm pressure of the sides of the tongue against the opposite parts of the organs; and release of this pressure for the wide. This makes prolongation easy and natural for the one, and not so for the other.

*The terms "natural," etc., as applied to the quantity of vowels, have been, indeed, used with various significations: in some cases, inappropriately or superfluously, as it appears to me; in others, and this may be true of some of the instances above-cited, "original," or "originally" would express the meaning more fitly than "natural" or "naturally." By M. Beauzée, a leading French grammarian of the last century, the terms in question were defined as having reference to the physical laws that control the movements of the vocal organs, and tend to make certain sounds brief and certain others prolonged; which view is in full accordance with the explanation given in the "Guide to Pronunciation,"

In proceeding to consider the sounds as associated with their symbols, it became necessary to distinguish from the several other sounds of each letter those which are properly called their "irregular long" and their "irregular short" sounds, and to direct attention to the established, phonetically abnormal, relationships between them, which stand forth as a singular and a prominent feature of the language. It is important to remember that the relations, just as we now have them, were involved in the old, the so-called English, rules for the pronunciation of Latin and Greek. Transmutation from the regular long to the regular short (or correlation between the two) may be observed in the Latin or Greek originals of English words; as, in *actus* compared with *agens*; *reductio*, with *reduco*; *concussio*, with *concutio*; *cēssio*, with *cēdo*—or it may appear in the formation of a new English from one or more Latin or Greek words; as, in *rēgicide* from *rex*, *rēgis*; or again, it may take place within the English itself; as, in *photōgraphy* from *photōgraph*. In all the earlier words of the language that have come down to us, the vowel sounds as we now have them are, to a greater or less extent, a development from a different earlier pronunciation; and it is in this way we are to account for the existence of the abnormal relations here in question. We know that the English vowel letters had originally the old Roman sounds; though a careful examination of the course of subsequent change makes it evident that the long and the short must even then have assumed the different qualities which we now distinguish by the terms narrow and wide. The long and the short *a* have both moved forward; the long *a* to the mid-front-narrow position; the short *a* not so far, and only to low-front-wide. The long *e* has moved from mid-front to high-front; while the short *e*, as mid-front-wide, remains nearly if not exactly what it was. The long *i* has been changed by diphthongation, or *guna*; while the short *i*, as high-front-wide, remains nearly if not exactly what it was. The long *o* remains mid-back-narrow, usually with the "vanish" in a higher position; while the short *o* has dropped a step lower. The long *u* has undergone diphthongation; at a quite early period it may have

been, and probably was, colored by French influence; while the short *u* has turned to a sound which I regard as of the mixed order, and which anyway has no direct relation to the long *u*. It has thus come about that the regular long and the regular short of the same letter are at present, in every instance, of a quite different quality. The difference is not a mere variation of narrow and wide: the two of each pair have come together from quite different positions of the organs. Yet they have become so associated by use and habit that to the common mind they seem to be the natural counterpart, each of the other. We have here a feature of the language that surely would demand attention in a Guide to Pronunciation.

The attempt of Dr. Emerson to defend the singular position which he had taken in regard to open and closed syllables is certainly lame, so far as the meaning can be understood. In such examples as *care*, *bare*, we find, applying the historical method, that the final *e* silent in this general class of words was originally sounded, thus making two syllables where we now have but one, and with the first of the two an open syllable. It was as having place in an open syllable that the sound of the vowel was determined; and the vowel has, in such words, remained long, not because but in spite of the fact that it now stands in a closed syllable. As for such examples as *hair*, *tear*, etc., the vowels in these were originally diphthongs, and therefore long, though in a closed syllable.

Dr. Emerson brings against the Dictionary, for discriminating between the vowel in *fern*, *bird*, etc., and that in *urn*, *word*, etc., the charge of setting up for a standard the opinion of orthoëpists in opposition to prevalent usage; though the paragraph which he quotes in part goes on to say, referring to the want of agreement in the pronunciation: "The unsettled usage makes such diversity allowable." The plan of the editors was not to dictate, or, except in clear cases, to lay down rules; but to state all the facts, or so far as by taking much pains they could ascertain them, both as regards present usage and the opinions of orthoëpists, and to leave every one, in view of these facts, to the guidance of his own judg-

ment. On the special point in question, they believed that there was a portion of the people for whose use the Dictionary was made who would desire to have the distinction noted; and that the number of these, together with their grade of culture and social position, was sufficient to warrant the accommodation to their preferences. On the question whether or not this method is "unscientific," we have, on the one hand, the dictum of Dr. Emerson, and, on the other the deliberate adoption of the method, not only by the editors of the 'International,' but by such acknowledged masters of lexicography as Dr. Murray and his coadjutors of the 'New English Dictionary.' It is not necessary to exaggerate the defects of the pronouncing dictionaries, or to re-echo the too common misrepresentation of their methods and aims, in order to lead people to welcome any properly conducted efforts, on the part of Dr. Emerson or Prof. Grandgent or others, to extend the knowledge of the actual facts. The discrimination, above referred to, of the two sounds is fully accounted for by the "historical development." The two have gradually approximated,—having had indeed originally four distinct starting-points,—and only within a comparatively recent period have the two become at all confounded. But the study of the historical development will help little in determining the present usage.

I would not deny that it may have become the fashion in some localities to substitute an *ah* sound for the short *o*. But, on putting the inquiry to several "competent observers," I found no one who regarded it as the generally prevalent custom. It is a deviation akin to that which Dickens has put into the mouth of one of his characters in the forms, *Gad*, *Lard*, *Jarge*, for God, Lord, George. That, in some of the replies to Mr. Grandgent's circular, the *o* was reported as unrounded is no way decisive on this point: an unrounded short *o* is not by everybody regarded as an *ah* sound.

As for *Mahomet* and *Mohammed*, I can see no good reason why, after I had said that not any notion of one of these forms, in English, as growing out of the other, had been either entertained or expressed, the imputation should still again be thrust forward, by inuendo with the help of misquotation. That the precise

form *Mahomet* owed its adoption, in both French and English, to the work of Mandeville, which was published simultaneously in both languages, I do not yet see any reason to doubt. The existence of earlier forms beginning with *Mah*, but otherwise different, makes rather for than against the supposition.

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SOURNÈTA:

*Mèste Règé è Moussu Laourèn.*¹

MÈSTRÈ Règé èra d'Aïgamorta, qué sé trova proché dé la Mar qu'apèloun la Mar Méditérrana, è Moussu Laourèn èra dé Sèn Laourèn qu'és à un'aoureta d'Aïgamorta.

Èroun dous ami intimé qué sé visitavoun souvèn. Iaviè lontèn qué s'èroun pa vis è Moussu Règé sé diguè, "Vai-t-en a Sèn Laourèn pèr vériré toun ami, Moussu Laourèn." Vèn, partis. Lou lon dé la routa saviè una

¹ The words of the story are written as they are pronounced to-day in the patois of the Canton of Sommières, Département du Gard, France. I have used *é* to indicate a sound between French mute *e* and the *ê*, something approaching the Spanish sound of *e* in *que*, in *el*. The quality of the *é* in the patois differs slightly from the French *é*; *en* (accented) should be pronounced pretty nearly like *in* in the French word *intention*; *en* (unaccented) like *en* in the English word *enclosed*, only with a stronger sound of *n*.

To facilitate the reading of the story I will give a résumé of it in English: Two good friends are in the habit of visiting one another. Mr. Règé on his way to St. Lauren finding an eagle's nest, makes up his mind to get, if possible, an eaglet for his friend. Unfortunately the mother-bird sees him, and fastening her talons on him carries him out over the Mediterranean. The eagle drops him into the water, but although bruised he manages to keep afloat and calls for help. A boat comes to his rescue. The sailors, a superstitious set, think him a devil, and in order to appease Providence, decide to throw him overboard. Mr. Règé pleads for his life, and seeing that he has to be thrown overboard begs to be put into a cask. His prayer is granted, and the cask in course of time is washed ashore. Through the bung-hole Mr. Règé secures the tail of an ox that has come to rub his back against the cask. Terrified, the ox runs with all his might, dragging the cask towards his master's home. In entering the gate, he dashes the cask to pieces against the curb-stone, thus liberating Mr. Règé, who finds himself at his own door. His wife and children, and Mr. Lauren, who had come to console them, receive him with joy, and he relates to them his adventures. Thanks are returned to God for his marvellous escape, and as the cock crows the story ends. *Moral*: Let the world alone, and especially all bad people, because if you quarrel with them you never know what may happen to you